doi.org/10.54473/IJTRET.2024.8410
International Journal of Trendy Research in Engineering and Technology
Volume 8 Issue 4 August 2024
ISSN No. 2582-0958

THE UNDERTONE OF SOCIO-POLITICAL TUSSLE IN NIGER DELTA REGION OF NIGERIA

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Received 09 June 2024 Received in Revised form 20 June 2024 Accepted 26 June 2024
Available online 30 June 2024

ABSTRACT

This research examined the undertone of socio-political tussle in Niger delta region of Nigeria. Data was collected through interviews given to the political class, civil servants, business owners and commoners. A random sampling technique was used to obtain a sample of 250 people from the target population and all respondents were interviewed. Data were analyzed using simple frequency and percentage (50%) as mean criteria. Examining the undertone of socio-political tussle in Niger Delta region of Nigeria include among others: the struggle for political dominance to control the state's oil wealth, the selfish interest in the personal use of the state funds at the expense of the interest of the region, the clash of the agreement where a party refused to honor the selfish agreement reached before between the current governor and his predecessor, believing that the oil wealth of the state should be used for the human and capital development of the region and not for the personnel consumption to the detriment of the first. The results of the study show that oil is the cause of ongoing socio-political conflicts in the Niger Delta region, which have catastrophic consequences and are already an obstacle to the development of the region.

Keywords: Niger Delta Region, Nigeria, Oil, Political Tussles, Natural Resources, Resource Course

I. INTRODUCTION

Since Shell National Oil Company discovered oil in 1956 in OLOBIRI, Bayelsa State, Nigeria's Niger Delta region has faced significant political instability and opposition. One of the main drivers is the allocation of oil revenue. In 1953, the region retained 100% of its oil income; by 1960, this reduced to 50%, and presently stands at a mere 13%. The residents view this as a grave injustice, arguing that the funds allocated from the federal budget are insufficient for regional development given the environmental degradation from oil extraction. The Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) counters that the remaining 87% of revenue is essential for nationwide development and blames regional leaders for mismanagement. The discontent dates back to 1953, when political friction arose due to the deportation of Professor Eyo Ita by the Igbo tribe, sparking demands from ethnic minorities Ibibio, Anang, Efik, Ijaw, and Ogoja for a separate state, Calabar-Ogoja-River (COR). This developed into a core issue in the European debates about Nigerian ethnic minorities' status. Resultantly, Professor Ita left the NCNC to form the National Independence Party (NIP). Another significant problem emerged in 1961, when Nigeria's Eastern Region allowed parts of Western Cameroon to secede, leading to territorial conflicts that culminated in the Cameroon-Nigeria dispute over the Bakassi region post a 1961 referendum. Prior to the Nigerian Civil War, Isaac Adaka Boro declared the independent Niger Delta Republic under President Ironsi's rule, highlighting the region's marginalization despite its oil wealth. The Southeastern Province was established, comprising the Colonial Calabar and Colonial Ogoja divisions, alongside the creation of Rivers State. Southeastern State was later divided into Cross River State and Akwa Ibom State, and Rivers State split into Rivers State and Bayelsa State. The struggle continued into the 1990s, driven by Ken Saro-Wiwa and the Ogoni tribe through the Ogoni Bill of Rights. Local communities protested the lack of economic development despite the wealth generated by oil, pointing to inadequate schools, roads, and hospitals, and severe environmental damage caused by foreign oil companies. In 1995, Ken Saro-Wiwa and nine members of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) were executed under Sani Abacha's regime, aggravating the conflict. By 1998, the Ijaw's Kaiama Declaration, expressing long-standing grievances against oil company practices, led to military occupation of Bayelsa and Delta states. Troops fired upon protesters, resulting in deaths and arrests. Subsequently, regional violence and sabotage against industrial facilities, such as the arrest of Shell employees by locals, became more frequent, drawing heightened government and military intervention and leading to human rights abuses. In 2006, a bomb explosion near a Niger Delta oil refinery served as a warning against Chinese investment in the region's oil industry. Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) explicitly warned the Chinese government to desist from exploiting what they termed "stolen oil." Concurrently, development initiatives like the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) and the Delta Development Initiative (DEVIN) have been announced to address these long-standing issues

. Uz and Uz Transnational is dedicated to improving lives in the Niger Delta, notably in Rivers State. In September 2008, MEND declared an "oil war" against pipelines and oil facilities, with significant losses reported by both sides. In August 2009, the Nigerian government offered amnesty, leading many militants to surrender their weapons for pardons, education, and training. In the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, since the civilian government took office in 1999, all six states in the region has witness one political tussle and opposition [Akwa Ibom State (Akpabio vs Udom Emmanuel), Bayelsa State (Saraki vs Silver and Silver vs Duru), Cross River State (Ben Ayade vs Peoples' Democratic Party), Delta State (Omoagege vs. Okowa), Edo State (Obaseki vs. Adams Osomolele) and Rivers State (Smilaye vs. Wike)] as some political elites try to gain power in government so as to decide who will govern each of the states in the region so as to control the money generated from oil exploration in the region. The most recent is that between the current Rivers State Governor Similaye Fubara and former Governor Nyeso Wike. Based on this perspective, this article aims to examine the undertone of political tussles in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria.

II. THEORETICAL LITERATURE

A. Resource Course Theory

The resource curse, also known as the paradox of abundance or the paradox of poverty, is the result of slow economic growth in regions/countries with many resources (such as fossil fuels and some minerals) when compared to those with fewer natural resources, the level of independence is lower and development outcomes are poor compared to other regions/countries with fewer resources. There are much theoretical and academic debate about the causes and avoidance of adverse outcomes. Most experts agree that the curse is not universal or inevitable, affecting some countries or regions under special circumstances. This surprising finding has been the subject of many religious studies (Gelb, [1]; Sachs and Warner; [2]; Auty, [3]; Gylfason; [4]; Sala-i-Martin and Subramanian; [5]; Smith, [6]). Their research provides evidence for analyzing the relationship between economic growth and resource abundance. The data includes data from 97 countries between 1970 and 1989. They use many variables such as initial GDP, investment, inequality, efficiency of bureaucracy, etc. Ploeg ([7], p. 381) recommends this approach because it preserves relations between countries. The export direction of natural resources usually occurs after the discovery of new resources or due to rapid price increases. For this reason, natural resources generally have a positive impact on the economy in the short term. It encourages exports (and exporting companies), reduces unemployment and thus supports economic growth. But it does not hold in the long term. What are the theoretical long-term manifestations of the curse? First, the slow economy is the main source of interest in most studies of the curse. The mining boom has made other sectors of the economy uncompetitive. The curse may also extend to the general growth index (Bulte, Deacon, [8]. It can also lead to differences in the distribution of wealth among different groups of people. Second, natural resource wealth often leads to political instability. This is because natural resources are "a gift from God". Third, resource-rich countries may find resource extraction very important. This leads to a different foreign trade deficit. Finally, excessive consumption of natural resources will have a negative impact on the environment. Environmental symptoms include many problems such as: mining dust, rural deformation, noise, water pollution, heavy water use, etc. All of these symptoms are usually caused by so-called “point sources,” where sources are located in a single location. This is why almost all exploration of resources is anathema only to minerals and oil. It should not be forgotten that not every country will experience all of these symptoms, but all the symptoms caused by the curse will affect the growth of the economy.

B. Literature Review

Nathan Udoinyang [9] examine oil: the hindrance to the economic diversification in Nigeria. The article showed the relationship between oil and the Nigerian economy, the positive contribution of oil to the Nigerian economy that increases national income, the main source of foreign exchange, provides employment opportunities, increase the standard of living, provide infrastructure, economic growth; shows the negative effect of oil on the Nigerian economy which made the country a monomaniacal economy, changed the sense of values and reasoning of the people, caused political instability, laziness and how oil has prevented the diversification of the economic situation of the country towards the neglect of agriculture. sector, uneven development among other sectors of the economy, human trafficking in rural areas, increased corruption and illegal activities. The article therefore concludes that the Nigerian government must curb all the negative effects of oil on the Nigerian economy to make it a great nation and also provide possible advice to diversify the Nigerian economy.

Adela Zubikova [10] Resource curse: case study of Nigeria. The purpose of this article is to examine the validity of capital curses in the case of Nigeria at the beginning of the new millennium. The study discusses natural resources as capital, symptoms of the curse, and transmission mechanisms, specifically testing the Prebisch-Singer theory, Dutch disease symptoms, and their negative political impacts like corruption, high government spending, and ineffective policies.

Moses Duruji & Okachikwu Dibia [11] investigate crude oil, resource curse and the splintering of Nigeria into national pieces. The purpose of this study is to find out why Nigeria is still underdeveloped despite the increase in income and how this affects the unity of the country.

They use secondary and qualitative data to examine why Nigeria remains underdeveloped and how poor economic structures contribute to national fragmentation and crisis. The study concludes that effective governance is urgently needed to save the Niger Delta and the entire country from underdevelopment-related misery.

Kadafa Adati Ayuba [12] explores the environmental impact of oil exploration and exploitation in Nigeria's Niger Delta. This article aims to explore various environmental issues related to oil exploration and spills in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria and provide insight into the significant environmental impacts to wetlands and marine ecosystems occurring in the region. The study notes that while oil has benefited Nigeria, it has also caused significant environmental damage, such as soil and water pollution, decline in marine life, and destruction of mangroves. These issues have led to community displacement, destruction of old buildings, and loss of agricultural and forest resources. The study argues for legal reforms and stricter monitoring of oil companies to ensure compliance, highlighting the government's failure to regularly oversee these sites. In essence, these studies collectively illustrate the paradox of Nigeria's oil wealth leading to political, economic, and environmental challenges, advocating for more robust governance, legal reform, and effective environmental monitoring to mitigate the resource curse's effects.

III. METHODOLOGY

In this study, we used interview as our method and response from the respondents were collected and analyzed using simple frequency and percentage with a mean criterion of 50% indicating that the total responds of the respondents that is above 50% was accepted while that below was rejected. This action was taken to guarantee that the target population we were targeting could be reached. We chose to utilize interview because our objectives are to assess the undertone of political tussles in Niger Delta region of Nigeria and it economic effect using Rivers State as a case study. 250 interview were randomly conducted among the political class, civil servant, business owners and commoners. 62 respondents were interviewed among the civil servant, business class and commoners while 64 politicians were interviewed it a total of 250 respondents. The responses from the interview were recorded/documented and analyzed.

IV. DATA PRESENTATION

Response of respondents on the undertone of political tussles in Niger Delta region of Nigeria. From the interview conducted, 25 respondents of the **political class** which constitute 10% are of the view that the political tussles in the state is a normal thing that must occur in every society and there must first be conflict before peace will rain. While 39 respondents which constitute 15.6% from the opposition party believe it a fight for political dominance in order to control the resources (oil wealth) in the state.

For the civil servant majority of them (48) which constitute 19.2% anonymously believe that the political tussles in the state is a game of interest which the interest is always a selfish interest for personal usage of state fund as against the benefit of the masses and state which in return will bring about economic deceleration in the state, while the remaining 14 respondents (5.6%) are of different opinion. For the **business owners,** 53 (21.2%) out of the 62 (24.8%) respondents and 57 (22.8%) out of the 62 (24.8%) respondents **(commoners)** are of same point of view that it's as a result of the wealth the region has which is generated from oil is the reason why there is yearly political tussles even when election have come and gone. Some of them made mention that the political tussles are as a result of breach of agreement where one party refused to keep to the selfish agreement entered earlier between the current governor and his predecessor, they emphasize that the present governor of the state believe that the wealth of the state which is generated from oil is to be use for both human and capital development of the state/region and not for personal consumption, that if the region is not endow with mineral resources like other part the country thou even if there may be crisis it wouldn't be like what it is now. They also lament that the resources that is supposed to be a blessing to states in Niger Delta region and country as a whole have now become a course that have taken many lives away and is now a hindrance to the development of the region and nation.

V. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Findings from the interview conducted among the political class, civil servant, business owners and commoners shows that 78.8% of the total population are of same believe that the political tussles in Niger Delta region in Nigeria is as a result of the quest to gain political dominance in order to control the resources in the state/ region, it's a game of interest which the interest is always a selfish one that is not for the benefit of the masses and state which in return will bring about economic deceleration in the state and region as a whole, it's a breach of agreement where one party refused to keep to the selfish agreement of the other by refusing the former assess to the oil wealth of the state which is believe it should be use for the development of the state/region. The findings also show that the presence of oil in Niger Delta region of Nigeria is now a course which have send so many lives to their early graves and have become a hindrance to the development of the region when compare to other regions of the country and there counterpart from other nations of the world which is in line with the findings of Udoinyang [9] and Adela Zubikova [10] that oil is the sole problem to most of the issues in Niger Delta region of Nigeria and all political and environmental conflicts in the region all have oil as it undertone which is the main hindrance to the economic development of the region thereby bringing about resource course in the region.

VI. CONCLUSION

In Niger Delta region of Nigeria, the political class, individuals and ethnic groups have been fighting for control of natural resources constantly. There is also a high level of corruption, the efficiency of natural resource management is poor, the environmental protection is at a low level and government authorities do not invest enough resources to other sector of the economy thereby making the region a mono- economy region. For the region to experience economic growth and development, the political class; individuals and ethnic groups must work together as one and also look/think beyond oil which will one day dry up.

VII. RECOMMENDATION

The study recommended the following to the political class, individuals, ethnic groups in Niger Delta region and government of Nigeria to:

1. increase transparency and accountability in the management of natural resources in the Niger Delta region in order to effectively prevent conflict and corruption of all kind.

2. compensate areas affected by oil spillage in order to prevent social unrest.

3. elect tested and trusted indigene into power during election.

4. prevent all form of political godfatherism before, during and after election.

5. invest more in education and other sector of the economy in the region.

6. look and think beyond the oil sector.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to all those who contributed to the completion of this paper. Especially, I thank my lovely wife Mrs. Veronica Nathan Udoinyang and all the respondents whose insightful guidance, expertise and response greatly enriched the content as well as for their invaluable support and encouragement throughout the research process. Their contributions have been instrumental in shaping the outcome of this work, and I extend my heartfelt thanks to each one of them.

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